

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 HA-05 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08

FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01

OMB-01 AGRE-00 /116 W

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R 050830Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8870

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0020

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1, 4 DIMPTD

TAGS: EAID UNDP EAGR EALR SWEL US LA

SUBJECT: HUNGER IN LAOS: SAYING IT WITH NUMBERS

REF: A 77 VIENTIANE 1244 NOTAL, B 77 VIENTIANE 1245

NOTAL, C 77 VIENTIANE 1690, D VIENTIANE 0809,

E VIENTIANE 0017 NOTAL

SUMMARY: THE LPDR/UNDP RELEASED A SECOND JOINT DROUGHT PROGRAM ASSISTANCE REPORT TO DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ON JANUARY 3, 1978. ON JANUARY 4, THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS BEGAN DELIVERY OF DIPLOMATIC NOTES TO DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS THAT SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED EMERGENCY BILATERAL ASSISTANCE. TEXT OF NOTE MFA ADDRESSED TO SECRETARY VANCE IS REPORTED REF E. THE DECEMBER DROUGHT REPORT REVISED DOWNWARD TOTAL RICE
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DEFICIT STATISTICS FROM THOSE FIRST REPORTED IN AUGUST. IT REPORTS 1977 RICE PRODUCTION, DEFICITS, AND NEEDS FOR EACH PROVINCE. EMBASSY BELIEVES STATISTICS IN THE REPORT ARE INACCURATE BUT THAT THE REPORT'S BASIC CONCLUSION IS CORRECT. LAOS IS SUFFERING FROM A SEVERE FOOD SHORTAGE AND MUST IMPORT MORE THAN 100,000 TONS OF RICE DURING 1978. END SUMMARY.

1. THE POST-HARVEST JOINT LPDR/UNDP DROUGHT ASSISTANCE REPORT WHICH WAS DISTRIBUTED TO DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS ON JANUARY 3, 1978, REVISED DOWNWARD THE ESTIMATE OF EMERGENCY FOODSTUFF IMPORTS THAT WOULD BE REQUIRED TO FEED THE POPULATION DURING THE 1978 "FOOD CRISIS" FROM 367,500 TONS (ESTIMATED IN THE AUGUST REPORT, REF A) TO 112,975 TONS (BASED ON A MONTHLY CONSUMPTION RATE OF TWELVE KILOGRAMS PER CAPITA). THE UNDP RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE AND THE JOINT REPORT BOTH EXPLAINED THAT THE DRAMATIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE AUGUST AND DECEMBER ESTIMATE WAS CAUSED BY THOSE FACTORS REPORTED REF C. EMBASSY IS POUCHING THE DECEMBER REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT.

2. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS CHEF DE CABINET SOUBANH SRITHIRATH CALLED IN U.S. CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JANUARY 4 IN ORDER TO HAND OVER A DIPLOMATIC NOTE ADDRESSED TO SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE WHICH REQUESTED US EMERGENCY DROUGHT AID, REF E. BRITISH, AUSTRALIAN, AND WEST GERMAN AMBASSADORS SAW DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS NOUPHAN SITHPASAY ON THE SAME DAY TO RECEIVE SIMILAR NOTES. AUSTRALIAN DIPLOMAT TOLD US THAT LPDR NOTE TO HIS GOVERNMENT SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED IRRIGATION PUMPS. (COMMENT: UNDP RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE TOLD US THAT HE HAD SUGGESTED TO THE LAO THAT THEY MAKE DIRECT APPEALS FOR

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EMERGENCY BILATERAL AID BOTH TO NON-COMMUNIST AND COMMUNIST NATIONS. END COMMENT)

3. THE DECEMBER REPORT ESTIMATES THE FOOD DEFICIT FOR EACH PROVINCE BASED ON THE LPDR PLANNING COMMITTEE'S POPULATION STATISTICS, THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE'S ESTIMATES FOR CROP PRODUCTION DURING A NORMAL YEAR, AND 1977 HARVEST DATA. THE REPORT CALCULATES THE NUMBER OF MONTHS IT WOULD TAKE FOR THE PEOPLE IN EACH PROVINCE TO DEplete THEIR STOCK FROM THE 1977 HARVEST USING BOTH THE MONTHLY CONSUMPTION RATE OF FIFTEEN AND TWELVE KILOGRAMS PER PERSON. FROM THESE FIGURES THE REPORT PREDICTS THE MONTH DURING 1978 THAT EACH PROVINCE WOULD RUN OUT OF RICE, ESTIMATES THE TONNAGE OF FOODSTUFFS THAT THE LAO WOULD HAVE TO IMPORT, AND ESTIMATES THE DATE BY WHICH FOOD AID WOULD HAVE TO ARRIVE TO SUSTAIN THE LOCAL POPULATION UNTIL THE MAIN CROP COULD BE HARVESTED, ABOUT NOVEMBER, 1978.

4. THE REPORT STATES THAT NGOMMALAD IN KHAMMOUANE PROVINCE AND THE PLAINS REGION IN SARAVAN PROVINCE WOULD NEED 2,400 TONS AND 16,102 TONS OF FOODSTUFF

RESPECTIVELY "AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT (JANUARY/
FEBRUARY 1978) DUE TO THE PARTICULARLY HEAVY LOSSES
SUSTAINED BY THE POPULATION" THERE. FOR MOST OTHER
DEFICIT PROVINCES THE REPORT SUGGESTS FOOD AID BE PRO-
VIDED BETWEEN MARCH AND JUNE 1978. THE REPORT CON-
CLUDED THAT PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES ARE IN A POSITION TO
ENSURE SATISFACTORY STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD TO
THE INTERIOR PROVINCES.

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5. THE REPORT STATES THAT THE CENTRAL AND NORTHERN
REGIONS OF LAOS WERE AFFECTED ONLY SLIGHTLY, IF AT ALL,
BY THE DROUGHT AND THAT OUDOMSAI, SAYABOURY, AND
PHONGSALY PROVINCES PRODUCED A SMALL RICE SURPLUS
DURING 1977. THE REPORT ALSO CLAIMS THAT CENTRAL AND
NORTHERN LAOS SUFFER FROM A CHRONIC RICE DEFICIT THAT
IS ONLY PARTLY COMPENSATED FOR BY THE PRODUCTION OF
OTHER STARCHY CROPS AND DRY SEASON RICE.

6. REF C REPORTED THAT THE LPDR HAD RECEIVED PLEDGES
OF ABOUT 50,000 TONS OF FOOD AID FROM INTERNATIONAL AND
BILATERAL DONORS IN RESPONSE TO THE AUGUST DROUGHT
ASSISTANCE PLEA. THIS FOOD AID WOULD REDUCE THE REPORTED

QUANTITY NEEDED TO MEET 1978 MINIMUM NEEDS TO 62,975 TONS OF ADDITIONAL FOOD IMPORTS. ACCORDING TO WORLD BANK FIGURES, THE ROYAL LAO GOVERNMENT COMMERCIALY CONFIDENTIAL

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IMPORTED RICE AT A COMPARABLE ANNUAL RATE: 61,000 TONS IN 1971; 54,000 TONS IN 1972; ABOUT 64,000 TONS IN 1973 AND 52,000 TONS IN 1974 (EXTRAPOLATED FROM THE IMPORT FIGURES FOR THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 1974). IN ADDITION USAID MADE MAJOR RICE CONTRIBUTIONS DURING THIS PERIOD, AS MUCH AS 75,000 TONS IN 1970 ALONE. CHEF DE CABINET OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SOUBANH SRITHIRATH TOLD EMBOFF IN AUGUST 1977 THAT THE LPDR HAD IMPORTED 100,000 TONS OF RICE IN 76/77 AND EXPECTED THAT THEY WOULD NEED TO IMPORT AT LEAST THAT AMOUNT IN 77/78.

7. COMMENT: REPORTS OF PRECISE PRODUCTION DATA FROM SPARSELY POPULATED REMOTE REGIONS WHERE GOVERNMENT CONTROL IS TENUOUS MUST BE REGARDED AS SUSPECT. NOTING THAT THE 1975 WORLD BANK STUDY REPORTED THAT RICE PRODUCTION FOR ALL OF LAOS WAS 490,000 TONS IN 1972; 530,000 TONS IN 1973; AND 543,000 TONS IN 1974, WE BELIEVE THAT THE REPORT'S ESTIMATION OF RICE PRODUCTION IN A NORMAL YEAR AT 718,455 TONS IS EXAGGERATED. WE ARE ALSO DISTURBED THAT WORLD FOOD PROGRAM COORDINATOR REPORTED DEFICIT STATISTICS (REF C) THAT WERE AT VARIANCE WITH THOSE REPORTED IN THE DECEMBER DROUGHT REPORT. FURTHERMORE, WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE WITH THE SOURCE IN REF D WHO REPORTED THAT THE OFFICIAL LPDR POPULATION FIGURE OF 3.4 MILLION USED AS A BASIC FIGURE IN THE DROUGHT REPORT CALCULATIONS IS EXAGGERATED. POPULATION ATTRITION FROM REFUGEE FLIGHT ALONE MAY HAVE REDUCED THE TOTAL LAO POPULATION BY TEN PERCENT (300,000) SINCE 1975. SLOPPY STATISTICAL ANALYSIS CASTS ANOTHER SHADOW ON THE REPORT'S RELIABILITY. FOR EXAMPLE, THE AUGUST EDITION REPORTED RICE PRODUCTION IN A NORMAL YEAR WOULD BE 40,800 TONS IN KHAMMOUANE AND

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118,760 TONS IN SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE. IN THE DECEMBER EDITION THE OFFICIAL NORMAL-YEAR FIGURES HAD CHANGED TO 81,045 AND 108,276 ONS RESPECTIVELY.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ASIDE, THE REPORT'S BASIC CONCLUSION THAT AT LEAST AS MUCH AS 113,000 TONS OF FOOD-

STUFF IMPORTS WOULD BE REQUIRED TO MEET FOOD NEEDS DURING 1978 SEEMS REASONABLE. SINCE THE LPDR ASSUMED POWEEER IN 1975, ITS EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD PRODUCTION HAVE BEEN THWARTED BY THE ACCUMULATED ILL EFFECTS OF BAD '75, '76AND '77 HARVESTS, SOCIAL UPHEAVAL, AND LACK OF AGRICULTURAL INPUTS, SKILLED TECHNICIANS, PRODUCTION INCENTIVES, A SECURE OR RELIABLE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM, AND A HEALTHY WORK FORCE.

9. IT IS EVIDENT THAT THERE IS A SERIOUS FOOD SHORTAGE IN LAOS TODAY. IF ANYTHING, THE LATEST REPORT'S DEFICIT ESTIMATE OF 113,000 TONS MAY BE ON THE LOW SIDE. MOREOVER, THE LPDR HAS LIMITED FOREIGN EXCHANGE TO SPEND ON CONSUMPTION IMPORTS AND NO REGULAR BILATERAL FOOD AID DONOR TO RELY ON TO MAKE UDCFOR CHRONIC ANNUAL DEFICITS. AN EMERGENCY DROUGHT APPEAL MAY BRING IN NEEDED AID IMPORTS DURING 1978 BUT A SIMILAR PROBLEM WILL PROBABLY ALSO HAVE TO BE FACED IN 1979.
MCWILLIAMS

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